



September 16, 2019

The Honorable Matthew J. Stricker  
Secretary of Natural Resources  
Patrick Henry Building  
1111 East Broad Street  
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Secretary Stricker,

On behalf of the George Washington Regional Commission (GWRC), we would like to thank you for your diligent efforts to secure the future of the Chesapeake Bay. Our planning commission has a long history of supporting solid environmental planning, and is proud of the work we have done jointly to do our part to clean and maintain the Bay.

After consulting with our own jurisdictional environmental experts, we do have several concerns we would like to bring to your attention. You may recognize that these closely align with those noted by both the Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) and the Virginia Municipal League (VML).

As the local keepers of public funds, we are concerned that the goals laid out in the Draft Phase III WIP are not reflected in Virginia's approved budget. The existing funding sources our jurisdictions use to meet water quality goals and needs, such as the Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF) and the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF), are underfunded and insufficient for the need. In FY2019, DEQ received applications for more than \$39.14 million in projects, but was only able to fund slightly more than half of those efforts. Unfortunately, this has been a trend for some time.

For the local governments we represent to effectively contribute to the kinds of goals laid out in the Draft Phase III WIP, we must be properly equipped with tools that will enable success. While funding sources are an important part of the equation, being provided with the necessary guidance and technical expertise is also essential. As localities, we need trusted sources of expertise and guidance on which we and our staff can rely. As such, the Commonwealth must do more to provide adequate funding, staffing and resources to the relevant state agencies as well as the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and Planning District Commissions like the GWRC.

Also of concern is the burden the Draft Phase III WIP places on the wastewater sector. That sector was already meeting its Total Maximum Daily Load (TDML) goals and was in fact disproportionately contributing to the Commonwealth's success in improving Bay water quality. In further tightening the nitrogen and phosphorous goals, however, the Commonwealth will be

requiring additional nutrient reductions from wastewater treatment plants, which will in turn require hundreds of millions of dollars in facility upgrades. Not only will this require enormous investments from the limited amount of WQIF funding available, but now a significant portion of that WQIF funding will be misdirected away from cost-effective and efficient nonpoint source pollution control projects that are already behind schedule. These new requirements will significantly disrupt publicly owned treatment works' current capital plans, rate structures and financial plans.

Finally, we are concerned with the haste with which the Commonwealth is moving forward with their new nitrogen and phosphorous goals. The new TMDL goals consider climate change and its effect on nutrient loads in the Chesapeake Bay, thus the reported need for further nutrient reductions. These new climate change reductions were unknown when the TMDL program was created, so to suddenly add major requirements this late in the 15-year process makes things much more difficult. Moreover, there are still ongoing studies from the Chesapeake Bay Program to really understand the magnitude of the impact of climate change. The EPA itself is not requiring numeric reductions yet at this time, and is instead waiting several more years to make a final decision.

On behalf of the Board of the George Washington Regional Commission, we urge the Commonwealth to be cautious in their Phase III WIP and ensure that the means embraced to achieve these goals are equitable and reasonable for all localities.

Again we are grateful to have had the opportunity to work with you and so many other valuable stakeholders that you have brought to the table, and we are thankful to have the chance to raise our concerns with you directly. Looking ahead, we are eager to continue to work with you to ensure that local governments and planning districts are enabled and empowered to continue to restore the Chesapeake Bay and ensure it remains a valuable resource for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Tim McLaughlin  
GWRC Chairman

Cc: GWRC Board